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Prof. Joshua Lederberg
Raymond and Beverly Sackler Foundation Scholar
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Dear Joshua:

What a pleasure to hear from you! I am flattered that you turn to me for advice about your proposed memoirs. But before I could even begin to respond intelligently to your questions, I would want to know what type of autobiography you wish to write – e.g., sanitized, warts-and-all, self-deification? From my standpoint, there is no “right” kind of memoir to write. It depends entirely on what messages you want to convey about yourself and your work and what audience you want to read it. After all, a memoir is simply your own way of constructing your life, a kind of fictional “truth” or truthful fiction, since there are many ways of doing so. In a sense, it is your way to “set the record straight.” That does not mean others will agree with your construction or not believe other interpretations are called for.

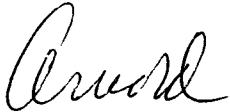
Incidentally, the sample passage you sent about your background is beautifully written. But from my standpoint, as someone who would like to know you better, it leaves a thousand questions unanswered. For instance, who did you resemble more, your mother or father, and in what ways? Your father was an orthodox rabbi, yet you became a “callow” agnostic. That says something important about you as a person – oppositional, questioning authority, conflict with parents, etc.? Later, you seem to suggest you restudied the Old Testament and seemed to gain a more satisfying interpretation. Does that mean you struggled with your being “Jewish” in the interim. How do you as a scientist reconcile religion and science? Also, did your religious background have any adverse or positive effects on your career, as it did for your cultural heroes, Albert Einstein and Chaim Weizmann? My questions as a quasi-expert in the autobiographical/biographical method go on and on.

In any event, I believe the best way to respond to your query at this time is to enclose a copy of my recent book, *HOW DO WE KNOW WHO WE ARE?: A Biography of the Self*. This offers a much more comprehensive treatment of the entire issue. Hopefully, you will find my discussion useful. At this point, the way I deal with this matter for myself is to write fiction so I can tell the truth.

I have taken the liberty of having my wife, Aline, read your email since she is in the process of completing her own memoirs and has struggled with a lot of the issues you raise. I agree with most of what she says.

One last comment. If you wished, I would feel privileged to review your completed (or uncompleted) memoirs and offer my responses to them. We either could communicate by phone or, better still, in person, if you (and your wife?) wished to spend a day or two with us as our guests. I do not know you well, but I know you well enough to want to know you better!

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Arnold".